

April, 2003

Volume 4, Issue 1

Current Developments



State Conservationist's Message



The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Michigan is now half way through fiscal year (FY) 2003. Several important developments have recently occurred that affect NRCS operations, including the passage of the FY 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, signed by President Bush on February 20, 2003.

The 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, H.J. Res. 2, provides new language regarding technical assistance for Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funded conservation programs:

- Establishes a permanent prohibition. This means that the agency cannot use the Conservation Operations (CO) account for technical assistance with respect to all CCC funded Conservation Programs (CRP, WRP, FPP, GRP, EQIP, WHIP).
- Allows the agency to use CCC funds for technical assistance beginning upon enactment until October 1, 2003, for several CCC-funded Conservation Programs (FPP, GRP, EQIP, and WHIP). Funds can be used from all of these accounts to provide for technical assistance to any CCC-funded program, including the acreage capped programs, (WRP and CRP)
- Modified legislative language that further provides that technical assistance funding shall not be subject to the Section 11 cap on CCC expenditures.

NRCS-Michigan has not received our FY 2003 budget allocation as of April 1, 2003. Until we receive our allocation and important budget decisions have been made, NRCS-Michigan will continue to carry out our operations in a prudent manner.

I would also like to reiterate NRCS Chief

Knight's four FY 2003 national priorities, as well as the two additional state priorities that I have established for NRCS-Michigan in FY 2003. The four national priorities are:

1. Implementing the Farm Bill,
2. Implementing the President's Management Initiative,
 - Strategic Management of Human Capital
 - Competitive Sourcing
 - Improved Financial Performance
 - Expanding e-Government
 - Budget and Program Integration
3. Increase Outreach Activities and Workforce Diversity, and
4. Strengthen the technical delivery system

In addition, I have established the following two FY 2003 NRCS-Michigan priorities:

1. Strengthen partner relations and expand partnerships, and
2. Provide high quality customer service.

All of the work that we do in FY 2003 will support these six priorities. Keep these in the forefront of your mind as you continue to plan your work for the coming months.

In closing, we all recognize that our agency is currently facing many challenges. I ask you not to panic or make any hasty decisions. However, I do ask you to maintain your resolve and to continue to carry out your job, as you always have, with dignity, honor, and respect. I thank you for your loyal and dedicated service to conservation and to the citizens of our great state. Your efforts do not go unnoticed by me.

RONALD C. WILLIAMS
State Conservationist

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Agriculture's Conference on the Environment (ACE)



The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and Michigan Farm Bureau hosted Agriculture's Conference on the Environment, the ACE Conference, on March 24th in Lansing, Michigan. The Natural Resources Conservation Service is a MAEAP partner and had a large exhibit space for to provide information for attendees. Program staff including Jim Marshall, Shannon Zezula, Brian MacMaster and Alan Herceg as well as Chris Coulon, Kevin Wickey and Steve Davis were on hand at the exhibit to answer questions.

Vicki Anderson (Resource Conservationist), Brian MacMaster (EQIP Coordinator) and Alan Herceg (ASTC for Programs) were information session presenters. Brian presented information on EQIP and other conservation programs in relation to livestock farms. Alan covered the same

information for non-livestock producers. Vicki presented information on nutrient management. Various other NRCS staff attended the event as resource professionals available to answer producer questions.

The conference drew approximately 600 people, primarily agricultural producers. Most information sessions were standing room only.

Producers and individuals interested in becoming technical service providers visited the NRCS exhibit with their questions regarding programs, conservation practices, regulations, and the process to become a technical service provider. A 16 foot table had NRCS staff lined up along it's length with people three deep on the opposite side waiting to have their questions addressed.

The large producer turn-out and volume of questions leaves no doubt that the ACE Conference was a much needed opportunity for people to

get up-to-the-minute information first-hand, clarify confusion, and learn about opportunities to enhance the environment on private land. The objectives of the conference included:

- Providing an opportunity to educate ALL farmers about environmental regulations and voluntary programs that effect their farms.
- Providing an opportunity for farmers to get current and accurate information about cost-share and other funding sources.
- Clearing up producer confusion about what is required on their farms.
- Allowing an opportunity to ask questions directly to decision-makers.

Based on those objectives the conference was clearly a huge success and a tremendous benefit to Michigan's agricultural community.

NRCS Exhibit at the ACE Conference



Iosco County Soil Survey Published

Twelve years after the Iosco County Soil Survey began the final product was unveiled at a dedication ceremony on March 14 in Tawas, Michigan.

Eric Johnson, Project Leader with the Michigan Department of Agriculture gave a brief history of the soil survey. Over 50,000 borings were taken and 20 new soils classified during the five years of the survey process. The original soil survey office was located in the county airport and later moved to the county transportation building. In the spring of 1996 the survey work was completed and the office closed.

The dedication ceremony was organized by the Iosco County Conservation District Executive Director Teresa DeLange and by NRCS District Conservationist Jerry Davis. Speakers included a county commissioner, Terry Bellville, Iosco Conservation District Board Chairman, State Representative Dale Sheltrown, Bev Bodem representing State Representative Tony Stamas, Bill Carpenter from MSU Extension, NRCS State Soil Scientist Bill Frederick representing State Conservationist Ron Williams, and Joe Gates from the U.S. Forest

Service.

After the presentation of the soil survey a "How To" workshop was given by Bill Frederick, Jerry Davis and Eric Johnson. Bill Frederick demonstrated the soil survey on CD, a digital format now available for computer users. The CD has the soil survey in pdf format and cannot be used for GIS applications. The pdf version is easy to replicate as hard copies of the soil survey are limited and will probably not be reprinted.

The workshop participants of road commission employees, realtors, landowners, utility department employees, township supervisors, engineering firm employees and health department employees learned how to locate a parcel of land and identify the soil types. Jerry presented various land use scenarios for which the participants had to use the survey to determine the suitability of the parcel for the particular land use. All participants received a copy of the soil survey after the hour-long workshop was completed.



Presentation of the Iosco County Soil Survey. L-R: Terry Bellville, CD Board Chairman, Bill Frederick, NRCS State Soil Scientist, Iosco County Commissioner John Moehring and Eric Johnson, MDA Project Leader.



NRCS District Conservationist Jerry Davis demonstrating the use of the Iosco County Soil Survey.

Cass County Success Story Highlighted in CTIC Publication

The January/February 2003 Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) publication "Partners" featured the conservation work done in the Donnell Lake Watershed, located in Cass County, MI.

Nitrates in the drinking water, often exceeding the EPA's maximum of 10 ppm, necessitated action on the part of watershed residents. Multiple sources of nitrogen, including agriculture and residential septic systems, were improved to mitigate the problem.

The 4,659 acre watershed is made up of 80 percent forests and agriculture, 9 percent lakes, 8 percent wetlands and 3 percent urban areas. According to the article, in the 1990's there were more hogs than people in the watershed, without enough land base to apply the manure at agronomic rates.

The headwaters of Christina Creek begin at Donnell Lake. The creek then flows through into the

St. Joseph River in Indiana. Christina Creek was on the Michigan DEQ list of impaired waters in 1998. If things didn't improve the creek would be in danger of TMDL status.

The Institute of Water Research at Michigan State University received EPA 319 funding to study the watershed and implement projects to address the resource concerns. Alex Bozymowski, District Conservationist in Cass County worked with the Institute to coordinate public meetings.

Several meetings were held from 1996-1998. Community members wanted safe drinking water but were wary of government interference and blamed each other for the problem. Through the public education process, everyone began to see how residences and farmers each contributed to the nitrate problem.

In Cass County hogs were primarily pastured. There was pressure on hog farmers to expand to remain competitive. Farmers had to make tough decisions, to modify their operations, confining the hogs for manure management purposes, or transitioning into other enterprises. Farmers that decided to confine their animals cited the cost share programs as

making that a viable alternative.

Other conservation measures were necessary even with confinement. Bozymowski assisted farmers with record-keeping and plans for manure application. Establishing permanent cover on pasture and excluding livestock from waterbodies addressed the nitrate problem as well.

In all, about 20 farmers implemented conservation measures to alleviate nitrate leaching between 1996 and 1999. Currently nearly all hogs in the watershed are confined.

Lakeside homeowners also did their part to improve water quality. A sanitary sewer system was installed around the lake, eliminating the need for septic systems. Deeper wells were drilled and well drillers tested for nitrates to ensure they reached an acceptable depth.

Today the water quality in the watershed is acceptable according to DEQ standards. Christina Creek is no longer on the verge of needing a TMDL. Nitrates have been reduced from approximately 34 ppm to nearly zero. If you'd like to learn more about this project contact Alex Bozymowski at 616-445-8643.



Black History Month Program

The Black Special Emphasis Program held an event at the NRCS State Office in commemoration of Black History Month on February 26, 2003.

Al Norwood, NRCS Black SEPM coordinated the event which featured Dr. LeRoi Ray, a former Western Michigan professor and VanBuren County farmer. The NRCS "Small Farmer of the Year" award was also presented by Outreach Coordinator Sandy Penn to Michigan's winner Barbara James Norman.

The event began with Norwood presenting an overview of the Black Special Emphasis Program, the goals of the program and challenges facing NRCS with recruitment. State Conservationist Ron Williams addressed the group of NRCS and other USDA employees as well.

Dr. Ray challenged the group to consider issues

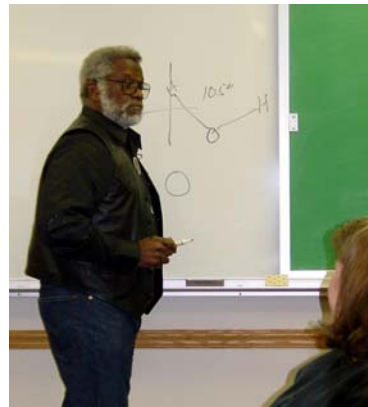
regarding parity in employment and gave statistics of Michigan State University's science and math faculty. He related his experience working as the only black scientist in a team working on aerosol research for a secret government project. He also told about his journey to discover all of the things ever written by W.E.B. DuBois, the first African American ever to receive a degree from Harvard University.

To conclude his presentation, Dr. Ray had the groups break out into discussion circles to talk about the challenges facing minority students. Though provoking discussions took place as individuals voiced their opinions.

The program was enjoyed by all and provided a moment to reflect on the meaning of Black History Month.



Al Norwood, Black SEPM



Dr. LeRoy Ray



Small group discussion at BHM Program



Sandy Penn and Barbara James Norman,
Small Farmer of the Year

The Buffer Initiative: Where Are We Now?

**TO DATE 1,374,670
MILES OF
CONSERVATION
BUFFERS HAVE
BEEN
ESTABLISHED
SINCE THE
CONSERVATION
BUFFER
INITIATIVE WAS
ESTABLISHED IN
1997**

In April, 1997 Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman announced the National Conservation Buffer Initiative. At that time, the administration established a goal of enrolling 2 million miles of buffers by 2002. Six national agricultural corporations pledged nearly \$1 million to complement USDA's efforts, including Cargill, ConAgra, Farmland Industries, Monsanto,

Pioneer Hi-Bred International, and Terra Industries--to help educate, encourage, and enable producers to install buffers.

In the nearly six years since the buffer initiative began, tremendous progress has been made towards that goal. While 2002 has passed, the initiative continues to strive for the 2 million mile goal.

The main programs used to assist interested producers establish and maintain buffers include the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP), the regular Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The following is a break-down of acres enrolled by program.

- WRP : 27,419 miles
- CCRP: 637,726 miles
- CRP: 33,783 miles

Additional assistance and cost-share was provided to landowners as well:

- Technical Assistance: 190,427 miles
- Cost-sharing programs: 185,315 miles.

This information obtained from "Buffer Notes", December 2002 issue.

Buffer Maintenance Tips

- Inspect buffers at least once a year, and always within a few days of severe storms for evidence of sediment, deposit, erosion, or concentrated flow channels.
- Grasses should be harvested, burned or in some instances, can be control grazed.
- Harvest fast growing tree species as early as possible.
- Harvesting should be timed to avoid harming wildlife mating, nesting and brooding.

Bob Tjaden & Glenda Weber
University of Maryland Extension

Marie Papciak Presents Historical Michigan Women

Did you know Michigander Sara Emma Edmonds became the only woman member of the Grand Army of the Republic (Union Army)? Or that Laura Smith Haviland of Adrian, Michigan helped between 40,000 – 100,000 slaves reach freedom through a Michigan station of the Underground Railroad?

Well, you probably didn't know those facts, which is why Marie Papciak takes on their characters and tells their stories, as the woman herself. Marie dresses in costume and recounts the lives of famous American women as if she were the woman she is portraying.

Her delightful presentation captivates the audience, so much so that often times young children believe she actually is the person she's pretending to be.

The Rural Development and NRCS Women's SEPM's, Winnie Kellogg and DeAnn Denton arranged for Marie to present Sara Emma Edmonds and Laura Smith Haviland in celebration of Women's History Month which takes place every March. Refreshments were provided and all USDA agencies were invited to attend the presentation which took place on March 20th in the NRCS

State Office.

The theme of Women's History month in 2003 is Women Pioneering the Future. Sarah Emma Admonds (1841-1898) dressed as a man and fought in the Union Army, later serving as a spy. Laura Smith Haviland (1801-1898) was a Quaker who established one of the first Michigan schools that admitted black students and established one of the first Michigan stations of the Underground Railroad. These Michigan women were true pioneers.



L: Winnie Kellogg, RD FWPM,
R: DeAnn Denton, NRCS FWPM

New e-Newsletter Features Plants' Role in Conservation

A new, full-color, electronic newsletter Plant Solutions, the NRCS Plant Materials Program newsletter, is now available through a list-serve subscription. Plant Solutions is a fun, brief read – two pages with color photos and interactive links for receiving additional information. The newsletter will be e-mailed six times a year. Each issue will focus on a particular conservation challenge and include a main feature story and sections called "Ask the Expert" and "Did You Know..."

The introductory issue of Plant Solutions focuses on using conservation plants to create wildlife habitat as part of Farm Bill programs like WHIP and CRP. It also offers information on inter-seeding existing CRP lands for ecological diversity and an update on the invasive species listing of Russian olive in some states.

Subsequent issues will cover costal restoration efforts, plants battling invasive species, re-vegetating after wildfire, landscaping with native plants, reclaiming

Superfund sites, new accomplishments in carbon sequestration, grasses for biofuels, and a look at culturally significant and medicinal plants. To view the current issue or to subscribe to Plant Solutions today, visit <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/eNews>.

*Information provided by NRCS
this Week*



SWCS to Conduct Regional Workshops in 2003

Mark your calendars and plan to attend these upcoming SWCS sponsored workshops.

An Upper Peninsula workshop for natural resource professionals is scheduled for June 20th and 21st. It will be conducted during prime-time walleye fishing season in the historic and scenic Sault Ste. Marie area. The outdoor seminar will present technical information relating to

current wildlife habitat programs being utilized in the region. Walt Summers, the SWCS regional representative for the Upper Peninsula is organizing the session.

The West Central and Southwest Michigan Region will be presenting a Streambank Management and Water Quality field-based seminar. This meeting will be held in late August at Grand Valley State University. Wendy

Ogilvie, SWCS President-Elect is the chief seminar coordinator.

The 2003 regional seminar series will close during the beauty of the peak fall color season in Northern Lower Michigan. This workshop will be conducted in the Gaylord or Grayling area. Forest Stewardship programming will be featured. Keith Martell, NRCS State Forester is providing leadership in coordinating the session.

*Submitted by Tom Fedewa,
SWCS Secretary*



The U.P. RC&D Named EPA Clean Water Partner

The Upper Peninsula RC&D was selected as one of only two Michigan groups chosen as EPA Clean Water Partners for the 21st Century. Only 79 programs in the country were selected as charter partners. The Marquette County Central Lake Superior Watershed Partnership is the other group receiving the honor.

The Upper Peninsula RC&D was established 30 years ago and has completed approximately 400 projects during that time. Randy Wilkinson, RC&D Coordinator says about the recognition, "It's an honor for all the water quality projects they've (the RC&D Council) worked on over the years."

The UP RC&D's current activities include plans to purchase two 160-acre parcels in Baraga and Marquette counties to be preserved as wetlands. Past projects ranged from flood control projects, installation of dry hydrants, sport field construction and community park maintenance.

About Our Organization...

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is the federal government agency that works hand-in-hand with people to conserve natural resources on private land. Using our scientific and technical expertise, and our partnerships with Conservation Districts and others, we help conserve and enhance all natural resources on private lands.

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